

# THE SUN CHASER <sup>1</sup>

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## I

“**N**O,” he said, looking down upon a lamp which was being lit, “it is just that Ambrose Clark wants to be happy. That’s why I got him the chance to light lamps. I thought it might help to make him happy.”

“Happy!” scoffed one. “He’s drunk — perpetually drunk!”

“Nevertheless,” objected the Doctor, “he is looking for happiness.”

“Why does n’t Ambrose get it then and stop —” began a young married woman, the Doctor’s daughter-in-law.

“And stop sun-chasing?” completed the Doctor. “Because so often happiness is hard to find and still harder to keep.”

Outside a child stumbled along as fast as she could, clinging to her father’s hand and stubbing now here and now there, in the rough places of the road, the ragged toe of one little boot. They traveled rapidly from street lamp to street lamp and left behind them scores of flames pale in the yellow evening sunlight which streamed over the village.

But when Pearl reached the outskirts of the town she held back, crying out, “Father, this is most as far as I can go with you, for mother does n’t know.”

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"Yes, yes," mumbled the Sun Chaser, "very far, very far."

"Father, what makes you shake that way now? Father, can't you stop here a minute before you chase the sun?"

"I'm eager to get on — to get on — to get on."

"But the sun's right up there, Father."

"Going after it — going after it — sun travels very fash — nobody knows how fash — fasher than I can get the lamps lighted — a hot race — all day — all night — forever! Going after it, Pearl — that's your name, Pearl?"

"Yes, Father."

The child looked up at him wonderingly: there could be only one explanation of so many strange phenomena and that was sun-chasing.

"Does your foot pain you very much again?" she asked.

"Bad pain," he mumbled.

"Then, Father, what *does* make you go after the sun?"

He shot a suspicious glance at Pearl clinging with both little hands to one of his. "I — I am hungry," he stutted.

Embarrassed, the child flushed. She ground the toe of the right boot around and around in the dirt. On the right boot the brass tip was gone but on the left it was still bright and shining,— the one bit of solidarity in what otherwise was about to go the way of all shoe leather.

Ambrose pointed to it. "Give it to me, Pearl," he said.

It shone like a coin, looked like a coin, maybe it could be passed as a coin.

"No, no, Father," she replied, "don't be silly!"

Hunger and pain, hunger and pain and failure, she thought, these were the lot of her father. Then one hand dropped from her father's and slipped to her pocket. Slowly she drew her hand out, in it a coin.

"Father," she said, holding it up to him, "I guess you won't be hungry any more, will you?"

The Sun Chaser snatched the coin greedily. This was what put wings even to a wooden-shod lame foot and double wings to a leather-shod.

"I must be going — going — going!" he cried.

And was gone.

Pearl watched him fleeing, at times almost flying,— hippity — hippity — hop after the sun, his long tawny hair blown out by the wind, his wild laughter echoed and re-echoed from the mountains towards which he fled. He was calling, calling, calling, and she watched until she could no longer see the burnished light on her father's hair or the distortion of the fleeing back.

Then the child turned towards the pale lighted lamps and went homewards in the dusk. Somehow she had gathered the impression that sun-chasing was inseparably part of a man's work and that it made men suffer, and the impression was terrible to her.

## II

The sun, bringer of joy, of warmth, healer, comforter, — the sun, glorious and glowing, was up there. Ambrose did not want to go back, for all the misery he had known in the world — and that was a great deal — had come from going back. Clinging by his fingers and the toe of leather-shod, he dragged wooden-shod and leather-shod with him up the cliff. But he had made scarcely more than a beginning before it seemed to him that the sun was gaining on him,—that he was losing the sun. Dismayed, he gaped upward, his cheek as close as lichen to the cliff. Soaring at the very peak of the great rock, the sun swam slowly, slowly out of sight: one fourth, two fourths, three fourths gone and there was nothing but the great burning eyelash, and then all gone.

To Ambrose, child of the light, it had become suddenly dark — the sun was gone. With a sob he let go his hold, slipped and tumbled down what he had scaled, and while

his cry was still flapping like a dark wing among the rocks, lay still.

On the other side, the sun, which was this time surely to have been his, was sinking down, down, down, in its diurnal course over other cliffs and rocky hills and above stony fields, meadows and shining streams.

The Sun Chaser's cry had flapped about on the rocks, and sunk into the forgotten place of cries, when Ambrose opened his eyes again and gazed into the darkness above him. He knew what this meant. The sun was gone, he had lost the sun again. With a cry he staggered to his feet, stumbled, and then, finding his way out, he plunged down over the stony fields and through the wet meadows. Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clippity, clippity-clop, all could hear him come running, and stumbling along the lamp-lighted streets.

"See his copper hair shine!" said a wife to her husband.

"He runs like something mad," answered her husband.

"When he came by last night," said a little girl, fear in her voice, "he looked in at this window, Mother."

"He's looking for something now," said the mother, "and I suppose that's why he lights lamps and chases the sun, although I'm sure nobody knows what ails Ambrose Clark except that he's drunk all the time."

"What do you suppose he is after?" asked a bride who stood by a darkened window, her lover's arm about her.

"The Doctor says happiness," answered the lover.

### III

When the Sun Chaser had reached the levels of the dark fields and then the dark and damp meadows, his first thought was that now, having lost it on its orbit, if he would find the sun again, he must go back. Yet all the misery he had ever known had come from going back.



Ambrose knew the place of the sun's rising,—to the east, on beyond Northerly, past the lamps, past the place he called home, out by the old mill where the stream rushed, the wheels had clacked once upon a time, the hills rose, and the sun morn after morn came up in the midst of lake and stream.

So he stumbled along feeling his way by fence post and stone wall until he came to four corners and from thence to the village. The Sun Chaser had a purpose and he had never faltered in that purpose: to overtake the sun and go on — never go back again — go on with it forever.

Ambrose Clark found his way wearily, unsteadily, past the single light of a cottage, past stones luminous grey in the star-light, past lighted windows, past the dark, straight boles of trees, through the lamp-lit street of Northerly, by the Doctor's windows, past a big shop, past the lock-up, past the minister's, past the undertaker's,—clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop.

The Doctor's grandchild was wakeful, and raised herself from her little white bed: "W'at zat," she called, "Sun Chaser comin' back again?"

"Yes, coming back again, my darling," answered her mother.

"Must he always come back?"

"Always," was the reply, "for there is no going forward that way."

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, step after lame step Ambrose went stumbling on through the night.

From the big shop a son of the storekeeper's looked out the window to see him go limping by.

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, on stumbled the leather-shod foot dragging the wooden-shod behind it, past the lock-up, through whose heavy iron grating Stephen Short, the town sheriff, was pushing bread and water to a thief. Thieves at large may buy bread a-plenty, or steal it, butter it with sunshine and freedom and, unwilling or wanton, be sufficed. Thieves caught must starve.

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, feet fumbling their way, head swimming until lamps and stars swung about like torches. Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, on past the parsonage, where the Good Man at evening prayers was reading of sin and redemption, of love and eternal life. Clip-clop!

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, the Sun Chaser was going swiftly now, not because he was nearing home but because he was passing the undertaker's. Clippity-clop, clippity-clop, leather-shod wildly dragging wooden-shod. And he was gone beyond the place he had wept because he must pass.

Before him, through the night, shone two lighted windows. Surely, pondered Ambrose Clark, the sun had left somewhat of itself shining there — yes, yes, this was the way, this was the way of the rising sun. All out there was his — pass the undertaker's and all was his, his cottage, his wife, his little Pearl, the bit of sun there chipped off and upright on the white deal table. All but the mill, — the mill was not his, and he sighed and put his fingers in his pocket. However, if no one stand in his way, a fragment of sun was better than none. He would get that and scatter its joy for all.

#### IV

"Mother," said Pearl, "is sun-chasing hard work?"

"It depends on what you mean by that," replied the mother. The iron hissed over the wet linen.

For an instant the child studied her mother's face. Then she lifted a ragged apron — once it had been sprigged with bright forget-me-nots, but that was before Ambrose Clark had a sunstroke, — and fumbled around in her dress pocket.

"It's here!" Her pale baby face lighted up. "See, Mother, Doctor gave me two of these."

She drew out a silver coin like the one she had given her father and held it under the lamplight.

The mother did not look. She turned over a flat and tested it with a moistened forefinger. Like an angry cat she ironed the iron spat back. Then she glanced at the child and down the child's thin legs to the boots from which parts of vamp and sole were gone. Not for an instant did she cease her ironing, for that was the work which bought all their bread.

"If only," she sighed, "you could have a pair of shoes! Where's the other?"

"You mean the other quarter, Mother?"

Pearl looked frightened.

"Yes, tell me," commanded the mother. "No, you need n't," she added bitterly. "You've given it to your father."

"But, Mother!" cried the child, "his foot hurt so — he said it did — and he said he had n't had any success in sun-chasing and —"

"There, there, that'll do! I know every one of those explanations backwards and forwards by this time. Anyway, don't give him that. You must have a pair of mittens. Thanksgiving's only a day off."

Pearl crowded closer to her mother's left side. About her mother's waist she clasped one arm, sighing, for it felt good to be so close to her. There were so many questions to try to understand. Mother's love seemed the only thing that was plain.

She stood some time so, undisturbed by the jerk and jar of her mother's ceaselessly active arm and the thumping on the ironing board.

"Mother," said Pearl, "if it were n't for Father feeling he must chase the sun, would n't we be just the happiest family in the whole world?"

"That's as might be, child, but perhaps so," replied Sybil.

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, soft as rain-fall on a moss-covered roof; fragment of sun, shining, upright, and nearer; golden and shining in the sun, gleam of waxed iron, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, softer than rain-fall on

a moss-covered roof — here was an end of defeat, this and then more. This and then more!

"Mother, what was that passed the window?" asked Pearl.

"Nothing, I guess. I heard nothing."

"But, Mother, I *saw* something."

"Did you? Well the nights are growing cold now — maybe a falling star."

Clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, around the house, to the door, to the latch. He who had never overtaken the whole must be wary in overtaking even a fragment of that sun whose possession spelled an end of defeat and misery. Clip-clop, clip — the door — clop — the latch — a rush, and it was his, his, his, swaying and gleaming, flaring and shining, dipping and flickering — his, his, his, in his hand, his own, part and parcel of the Great One. Toss it, catch it, brandish it! His, his, his, forever!

"Ambrose!" came Sybil's cry, "for God's sake set that lamp down — set it down!"

Fools, fools, fools, they had it and did not even know that it was beside them. His child, his child should have it all — never go out into the night and the dark — never chase the sun and never find — his child!

"Father!" came another cry, "it burns so! The lamp's burning me!"

Nearer again swung the lamp, torch of flame and blackened stream of smoke. Scatter it like this — joy and joy and joy!

Smell of smoke, screams of a child, the tigerish leap of a woman upon a man, a crashing lamp, a black room and the dull thud and thrashing of struggle upon the floor; then moans and silence.

Up out of the blackness and silence, the Sun Chaser raised himself on knee and leather-shod foot, setting wooden-shod beside it. The windows were pale and silvery with the night light; in the room was the smell of lamp soot and burned hair; behind him the grate of the kitchen stove gleamed like an evil eye.



See what they had done! Happiness and to spare for all, and they had defeated him. Sybil had always been against him. Anyhow he had done his best to find and scatter joy over them all. Clip-clop — something soft, hop around it dragging wooden-shod; clip-clop, clip-clop, something again; around it, clip-clop, clippity-clop, clip-clop; the latch; out, clip-clop, clip-clop; to the mill; the dawn again; the mill had always brought dawn back to him again; but at the mill one had to pay — thumb and forefinger into pocket,— yes, the silver piece Pearl had given him lay there — clippity-clop, clippity-clop, clippity-clop, not so fast as past the undertaker's but fast as he could go, now, with a clippity-clippity, clippity-clop, stars and moon and trees swinging around his head.

## V

The Miller had been sitting in the dark to save oil. He had ceased to grind wheat since he had discovered that there was more gold which came by means of no grinding. Nevertheless he was called the Miller,— old Harding, the Miller.

He rose and stood behind the closed shutters to look out between their wooden slats upon the road down which Ambrose Clark was limping. Above the Miller's head there was the shuffling noise of slippered feet.

"She's getting ready," he muttered.

But he stood by the shutters watching Ambrose Clark and rubbing his hands. Then he laughed and rubbed his hands and rubbed his hands and rubbed them, and drew in his breath until it clicked. No one knew better than he did that the Sun Chaser was a fool.

He pushed the slats down so that not even a cat's eye of light could be revealed and set a match to a candle. He lifted the lighted candle and let Ambrose in. The candle-light flickered on the Sun Chaser's copper-colored hair and burning face. In the blood-shot, chameleon-like eyes the Miller read all he needed to know.

"What you got?" demanded the Miller.

Ambrose fumbled in his pocket and produced the silver piece Pearl had given him.

This silver had been warmed by her little hands and made bright, too, by rubbing so that a pretty picture of Liberty would show and a child's eyes could read the words, "In God we trust."

The Miller held the coin under the candle-flame, bit it with his teeth and then put it in his pocket.

He blew out the candle and left Ambrose in the dark. He went out into the yard to the pile of logs. The Miller brought a jug in and poured from it something yellow and murky and from which fumes rose. Ambrose watched the Miller pour, wildly, eagerly watched him. Even before the glass brimmed, he snatched it. The Sun Chaser tossed off the first glass. It stung and smarted, it thrilled and stabbed, it gripped like a hot metal hand at his quivering nerves and seemed to steady them; it sent the tears of relief gushing to his eyes; it swam and swarmed, out, out, out to the furthestmost surfaces of his being; it tingled and bit at his fingers and ears; it seethed in his belly like summer heat; and it seared all misery from his mind. The Miller was watching the face that paled and flamed and then glazed into a semblance of steadiness.

"What luck?" he asked, rubbing his hands.

"None, none to-day," answered the Sun Chaser, holding out his glass for another drink, "but to-morrow I shall overtake the sun."

Harding lifted the jug, held it above the glass and poured.

The Sun Chaser took the glass in one hand and with the other seized the Miller by the front of his coat, drew him closer and whispered in his ear, "I tell you how I know this. I found — a piece — on the table — for the first time."

"A piece of what?" asked the Miller, thinking of money.

"The sun, of course," and Ambrose nodded, "but my wife's against me — damn the women!"

A man came up the walk, entered and sat down on the bench from which he demanded a drink. As he was lifting his glass to his lips another entered, sat down on the bench too, and called for liquor. They came quickly now until the bench was full and men were standing about in the corridor — all waiting.

The Sun Chaser had laughed until he cried. Then he began to curse, and in the sitting room into which the Miller had shut him he cursed on and on, repeating now with a cry, now with a laugh, "Damn the women! Damn the women! All against us! All against us!"

Finally he sank down on an ancient, gutted-out, horse-hair sofa, and screamed and cried and laughed and cursed, and struck at the floor with his wooden-shod foot and struck at the floor with his leather-shod foot. Then he wept alone. Alone, too, he murmured over and over, "As for me, give me the sun — the sun for me!" Finally he sank back on the sofa, crumpled up, and lay senseless upon it.

## VI

There was much coming and going that night. When, just before dawn, the last man was going, the Sun Chaser still lay upon the black sofa, his breath loud and hoarse, his face livid, and his wooden-shod foot hanging over the edge of the sofa.

Outside, were gray stones luminous at dawn. Outside, as birds left their perches, was the stir of branches. Outside, even the spiral roots of bush and flower and the stiffened tendrils of vines knew what the Sun Chaser no longer knew: that dawn was coming and the sun would rise over the eastern hills and take its stately, beneficent way westward. Outside, a little pool which had always lain on the margin of the Miller's stream, caught the coming dawn as good eyes take the light, and, like faith,

reflected the color of heaven and was tremulous with the virgin white of birches.

"Get up!" shouted Harding.

Ambrose Clark did not answer. The Miller fetched a glass of cold water and flung it in the Sun Chaser's face. With a cry Ambrose jerked upright and put out his hands to shield himself.

"Get out of here now, you fool!" commanded the Miller, pushing him towards the door.

This to the Sun Chaser,—he who could and would overtake the sun one day and be lord of all its domain of joy and warmth.

The Miller's left hand was already on the bolt that would bar the Sun Chaser outside. And Ambrose stumbled forward over the sill into a world of dawn.

Clip-clop and stop, clip-clop and on, clip-clop and stop, clip-clop and on. As wooden-shod struck the ground the frozen earth sounded like vast, dry, shackling ribs of frost. Clip-clop and on, clip-clop and stop, and on and stop and on and stop.

By the road were bare, swinging, bead-budded larches waiting for the kindling of another spring, and up on the hillsides the wave-lines of wind-swept, pain-tossed trees. Again, dawn was coming and coming quickly. Above the deep blue hills was a horizon of clear amber and above this, flocking a million-fold, were rosy, winged clouds. Clip-clop and on, clip-clop and stop, on, clip-clip-clip and fall.

There were no leaves anywhere on the trees except the withered, still grayish-green leaves of the poplar. Everywhere in the dark, leafless woods were seen the fine, white lines of birch saplings etching the sombreness.

Not much more than a tree's length from his own door the Sun Chaser fell. The door, still ajar, was moving to and fro in the cool, playful gusts of the dawn wind. The sun was coming—undoubtedly the sun was coming, heralded by light and song, wind and color. But the Sun Chaser saw none of it, for he was lying face



down in the ditch by the roadside. The sun was coming; already the little, white, spiral roots felt it, the mice in the fields knew it, the squirrels in their holes, wing of bird and tip of tree knew it, but the Sun Chaser, face down in the ditch, knew nothing.

At no point of the Sun Chaser's consciousness did the sun touch him. He had passed the Border Land and entered a land where, for the time being, there was nothing, neither cry of the heart nor stirring of the soul. The lamp-lighter, who should be putting out his lights now, lay face down in the ditch.

As the night wore on Sybil Clark toiled heavily back to consciousness, aware of a weight on breast and heart. But when she opened her eyes slowly there shaped itself before her only the outlines of the kitchen stove.

"Oh," she sighed, "the fire's gone out!"

Consciousness widened and grew warmer. Against her bosom lay something lighter than the heavy breath she drew,—something soft and warm and comforting. She lifted her left hand and felt the child's head over which she had closed with the Sun Chaser. With a cry she drew it closer. Blessed, blessed, blessed, blessed little one! She knew not whether this was sleep or what it was,—may be heaven itself.

Strength rushed back on her like a tidal wave. She struggled to her feet and gathered up the sleeping child and stumbled with her into the adjoining room. All the hard, all the bitter realities were gone, and there remained only the kindest and greatest of them all,—mother and child! She laid Pearl on the bed. She lighted a candle and gazed down on the little face, and upon the child's temple with its long, red blister where the lamp chimney had scarred it.

"I'll light the fire first," she said. "I wonder where he is?"

The fire lighted, she went to the door and looked out, saw the changing night and the morning star in the east. She stood there for a few seconds. Color was brighten-

ing behind the dark hills and gray turning to blue and blue to rose and to gold. The morning star was waning and pearl-colored clouds, a million-fold, were flocking upwards.

With one look back into the kitchen where the fire was crackling, she drew the door to softly and went out.

As she started up towards the mill, she saw a figure coming towards her. It was Stephen Short, the sheriff. Her hand felt nervously at her torn collar and traveled up her chin to the gashed cheek and bruised temple.

"Good morning, ma'am," said the young sheriff, looking past her.

Sybil followed his glance. Yes, there was what she had come to seek. It was lying face downward in the ditch.

Sybil Clark was the first to go forward.

"Ambrose," she said quietly, turning him towards her, "wake up!"

The Sun, bringer of joy, of warmth, healer, comforter, had risen to the hill summit and shone down upon the ditch. The Sun Chaser was dreaming — dreaming that he did not want to go back, for all the misery he had ever known in this world had come from going back. He wanted to overtake the sun, and, then, Sybil and Pearl beside him, go on and on with it forever.

"Don't stop me," he moaned.

"Ambrose," repeated the wife, "Ambrose, wake up!"

"There," said the sheriff, "he is n't fit to go with you. I'll take him along with me."

"No, no," cried Sybil. "He's mine and you can't take him."

"I'll take him just the same. This has gone on long enough," and Stephen Short looked significantly at the scarred cheek.

"He did n't mean to — it was the lamp — he —"

"Well, he'll come with me."

"No, no," came from Sybil, "you must n't! Everything would be different if you could only make men see

things different. Ambrose is n't bad. It's just that Ambrose has n't ever settled down to what it means to be a — a husband."

"Or a father."

"Or a father, Stephen Short. But there are lots of children in the world who have n't ever had more than one parent, Stephen Short. The birds could teach men lessons they have n't ever learned. Men are that way, Stephen Short. They keep on traveling. Ambrose has that idea about the sun in his head."

"Well," said the young sheriff quietly, "I'll take him along with me and give him a chance to think about the idea."

## VII

A stranger passing by the town lock-up would have seen that it had become the center of town interest. For the lover of the antique, its architecture might have had something to do with that. It was a square box, perhaps ten feet by ten, only a single storey high. On its roof the cedar shingles had turned to a heavy moss green with here and there ferns or the dried fronds of ferns, standing up. The clapboards with which the sides had been covered — perhaps the singing heart of the new wood was not yet dead and was letting in the cool, fresh air to still the cry of pain, "Aah-yaiah!" so often heard there. There was no paint to be seen. Years ago had that been washed away by drizzle and drip of rain and snow from the heavy, over-hanging trees. A long, broken narrow board walk led from the street to the steps of the lock-up. There was no stoop. There were no windows. In the heavy door was set an iron-barred grating, two feet high and a foot and a half wide. From the lock-up, an eighth of a mile westward, lay the children's school. An eighth of a mile eastward the village paper-hanger had his shop.

The citizens of Northerly had not congregated about

the lock-up, passed it and re-passed it and stared at it from every conceivable vantage point, because they loved the antique — unless by that antique injustice is meant. They had heard the age-old cry of pain, "Aah-yaiah!" and seen a hand cling like a bird claw to the bars, and heard repeated that wail, "Aah-yaiah!"

The Undertaker said, "We hear Stephen Short beat on the soles of the Sun Chaser's feet till he woke up and cried."

"Oh," objected the paper hanger, "why did he beat on the soles of his feet — one foot lame, too?"

The first winked. "Well," he said amiably, "it's good treatment for sun-chasing — all they're fit for anyway."

"I can remember," said the paper-hanger, "when Ambrose Clark was the best of fellows — before he was sunstruck, you know."

"Go 'long," laughed a third man coming up, "who ever heard of sunstroke making a man behave the way Ambrose Clark does?"

"One thing's sure," replied the little paper-hanger bitterly, "what most people don't know anything about is what they won't believe in."

"Oh, come now," objected the sheriff, "the Sun Chaser's plain drunk and you know it."

"Well, perhaps he is. I didn't say he was n't. But he's ill. You would n't beat an insane man, would you? Yet they used to do that here, Stephen,— whip them till the welts stood out all over them, and starve them and put them out in the storm and cold to be cured. What'd happen to you, Stephen, if you did that?" asked the little paper-hanger wearily.

Their eyes met. To Stephen Short there came a vague apprehension,— almost fear. A far off, down a very long, dark road shadowed at the end in blackness, light appeared, no bigger than the palm of a man's hand. The light was wavering and casting strange shadows on the blackness and traveling feebly up, up, up the hill towards him.



It was five o'clock and school was letting out. The children began to pass that way. They went by in a whirl of dust, and, making the steps of the paper-hanger's in safety, they cried and laughed with excitement.

"Oh, I thought the Sun Chaser 'd catch me!" shouted one.

"No, you silly, he's in the lock-up."

"Why did you run, then?" asked a third.

"He's a murderer," came the reply, "for he tried to kill Pearl."

"Oh!" chorused the children.

Giggling and squealing, they peeped around the edge of the paper-hanger's porch towards the lock-up.

"It is n't nithe to lath at the Sun Chaser," lisped the Doctor's little grandchild, "'cause he needs help."

"Pooh!" came the pert reply from a rosy-cheeked little girl, "my mother said what the Sun Chaser needed was n't help but it was hanging."

In the lock-up the Sun Chaser had fallen back from the bars, and leather-shod and wooden-shod beat heavily on the floor. In his delirium too much called for his attention to leave him any interest in what passed outside.

It was the old, old question of sun chasing,—to fight through all to the sun at last, and beleaguered and surrounded by camps of enemies, to find a way through.

In his weakness, because he needed it more, the more violently did he struggle towards the sun,—ever towards the sun, wooden-shod and leather-shod beating on the floor, his thoughts molten lava of desire, of defeat, of hope. Then, convulsed, he flung himself towards the bars, gripped them with his white fingers and shook them, crying out, "Aah-yaiah!" and laughed and shook his tawny hair only to fall back in defeat—the old defeat.

For a time back and forth between the bars and the floor he flung himself. Beyond the bars the westering sun had slipped behind gray, snow-laden clouds. Along the floor lay the path out, clip-clop, clippity-clop, clip-clop,

clippity-clop, clippity, clippity-clop to the west and the sun. Yet within him he felt hope burning to ashes and the sun gone from him never to return any more.

He lay there, where he had fallen back on the boards, and picked at the floor — picked incessantly. Faster and faster grew the beat of his westering running feet; clip-clop, clip-clop, clippity-clop, clip and stop, clip and hop, clip and stop.

Outside, the light had withdrawn quickly behind snow-laden clouds,—faster than the swiftest flight of any step.

Once in a while from behind the grating of the lock-up came the old reverberation of lame steps, fleeing homeward after sunset, fainter and fainter: clip-clop, clippity-clop, clip-clop, wraith of sound vibrating from the prison floor where wooden-shod and leather-shod lay twitching in answer to the maddened brain. The sun, the sun, always the sun still seething in the fiery furnace of the Sun Chaser's mind.

Outside, now here, now there, a window brightened with lighted candle or lighted lamp. Outside, a month ago, leaves had fallen, fallen, fallen all night long and all day long. Everywhere in the silence of night had been heard the mysterious creeping sound of their falling. By day when the Sun Chaser had sped westward, leaves had lain everywhere on the outstretched arms of spruces and like golden snow upon the roadways and little paths. Now there had begun a still more mysterious rustle, an infinite stirring upon the moss-covered roof,—the rustle of the first snow.

## VIII

There was one child who did not pass either way that day to school. And there was one mother who hearing in her heart that age-old cry of pain, and seeing, graven there, those white, clutching fingers, ironed tears into the linen on her board,—those that she could not brush away with the back of her hand. She had no theories

about Ambrose. She knew that he was good. There were those who were bad, but Ambrose was not among them. She knew, also, that this thought she could never prove to any one. It was true only in her own heart. Yet who should know better than she did?

The iron was hot and Sybil ironed, hissing over a tear dropped onto the white linen.

"Mother," asked Pearl, "will Father be hungry?"

Sybil gathered her work together.

"I wish," she said wistfully, "that this storm had n't set in. But you'll be safe here, Pearl. With the money the Doctor's wife will pay for this wash I can bring back enough food to see us through most of the week safely." Her face brightened and she looked around the kitchen once more. "I've left a good fire for you."

"Mother," Pearl asked, one hand deep in her pocket as she turned a coin, "can I go with you?"

"Out in this?" said the mother, looking towards the darkening windows. "No, of course not."

"Are you going to get Father something?"

"No, I am not," came decisively.

"Oh-h," murmured the child. Again she turned the coin in her pocket. "Mother, won't Father be hungry?"

"They'll look out for him, I guess, where he is now."

Pearl's hand clutched the bit of silver until its thin edge cut into her palm. She was seeing the dark, gruesome place where they had shut up her father.

"Mother," she gasped, "couldn't you take Father something to eat?"

"No," said her mother, tying on her hat, "they would n't allow that!"

"They!" The word clicked in the child's ear like the mysterious key to the sorrows that were all about her, but into whose deepest dungeon she had never been allowed to enter. "They," then, had put her father there and might or might not, as it happened, feed her father.

Without further questioning, Pearl let her mother go. Through the snow as far as the gate she could see the

heavily laden form moving, and then the storm shut off further sight.

Her hand clutched the coin in terror. Hunger! Hunger! In her ears there rang, muffled, the clip-clop, clip-clop, of her father's lame step. And he had said only the day before that he was hungry.

Nothing beyond the gate was to be seen but the falling snow drawn hither and yon, shroud-like, by the tempest shaking the trees. Pearl ran for her coat, and leaping after her mother, was off like a rabbit. In the white rush of snow and wind she sped on until she caught sight of her mother's storm-beaten figure. After that, step for step, she followed on unseen behind her.

Three pheasants, frightened away from the dense undergrowth of a white cedar, where they were taking shelter, started up with a "cut-cut-cut" and a swish of long tail feathers as they disappeared into the whirling snow storm. The wave lines of the wind-beaten trees grew more distorted as the trees swayed and cracked in the blast. The long, bead-budded branches of the larches were whipped out like whitened hair. It was becoming rapidly darker. In the eerie light shadows were not, or seemed to merge, like thoughts of a disordered mind, into the whirling phantasmagoria of storm. Below, the lamps of Northerly, lighted this night by hands not the Sun Chaser's, twinkled mistily.

Pearl's fingers grew colder and colder as she followed the burden-bent figure of her mother, and the light, icy snow filled into the stubbed, open toes of her boots and chinked up the loose tops and melted down onto the feet. The lights of the town they were approaching obliged her to drop behind a little. Was it not something, she was thinking, that her father had lighted these lamps?

She watched her mother pass the big store and go on toward the Doctor's house. She waited an instant, and then, hand clutching coin, she bounded into the store and came to a standstill trembling in the midst of its unaccustomed splendor of light and color.



The Doctor, on his way out, paused just inside the door. "Well, well, well," he said, "so here we are again!"

"Yes, sir," agreed Pearl, her eyes blinking, her cold, red nose quivering.

"Where's your mother, child?"

"Please, sir, she's gone to your house."

"Oh, that's it!" smiled the Doctor, "and you're waiting here."

He leaned over and looked at the scar which the snow had not hidden.

"Come closer," he commanded.

He tilted Pearl's snow-wet face back and studied the deep scar across the left temple.

"Too bad," he muttered, thinking of the Sun Chaser, and not of the child, whose frightened eyes scanned his face.

"Yes, sir," agreed Pearl, "it was the lamp did it."

He who had seen so much of the tragedy of human life heard the blow of the mallet already driving a wedge down between this little thing and the world at large.

He tucked a coin into one of the empty, frost-bitten hands.

"Here, David," he called, "give the child the best mittens you have — those like my granddaughter's."

And with a genial wink he was gone.

"So it's mittens," said David with assurance.

Pearl pressed up to the counter, lifted her thin little chin, looked out of her frightened, reddened eyes into the face of the lad above her, and whispered, "Please, sir, not mittens, but something to eat."

David grasped the edge of the counter and stared. This little thing was hungry.

"You say you're hungry?" he demanded angrily.

He had never known before that a little child could go hungry and not be fed.

Pearl shrank back. He was angry with her because he thought she could n't pay, she believed.

"Please," she said, "something to eat with this."

She held out her hand, her money in its tiny palm.

"Did n't you have any dinner?" demanded the boy.

"Please, sir, no, but this is my money."

The lad's face had turned very red — even his neck was red. He was pulling out and setting down with hurried thumps various articles of food, bread, butter, cheese, cookies. They came from every direction storming down on the oaken counter.

"Eat," commanded the boy savagely, "and take what you can't eat."

Growling he turned his back on Pearl.

"Please, sir," came tremulously, "I have n't time."

"Have n't time to eat?" David whisked about.

Pearl pointed at the bread and butter. "Please, sir, can I buy this with this money."

She held up the coins and pointed to the loaves.

The boy's eyes blazed. "Take it all, child, take it all."

Quickly she set her money down on the counter; quietly she wrapped her little arms about the loaves of bread, and silently she was gone, even while David had turned to find the mittens.

When he came out he dangled the mittens to an empty counter. He looked over the counter to be sure the child had not fallen behind it, then he ran and jerked open the door.

"Little girl," he called out into the storm, "you've forgotten your mittens!"

But there was no answer.

## IX

With fear of neighbours, Pearl hurried on breathlessly — on towards the dark place, beyond the lights, where her father was. Mutely she knew that some penalty was attached to being the Sun Chaser's child. She trembled a little at the thought of the bars. She struggled on

through the tempest — that storm in which hundreds of lives were lost upon the great lakes and scores of ships went down and which smothered all the northland in many feet of snow, for this was that autumnal equinox when Saturn hung low in the east with its malefic influences of storm, sickness and suffering.

Deeper and deeper grew the way Pearl had to travel. She passed many places where the house lights shone in warm chinks through the drawn shades, or shades were snapped up for an instant so that the family might look out upon the storm. Each house that she passed was a mile-stone in the battle she fought without a fear except that of neighbors.

Her fingers were so cold that she could no longer move them easily about the bread. Her lips were blue and her teeth chattered.

But the paper-hanger's was reached and passed, and the child, undaunted, struggled on. The snow fell thick and heavily, mounted in a drift here, was tunneled out by the raging wind there. It was not possible to see five feet ahead of her own two feet. The paper-hanger's light, not more than twenty feet behind her, gleamed like a mist-shrouded lantern at sea.

Pearl felt for the walk that would lead in to the place where her father was. With one stubbed-out boot toe she scuffed along the edge, found the walk and turned in. The wind was at the child's side, now, hurling itself against her, but she bent sideways and struggled on. In the white battle that raged all about her, she stubbed her boot against the first step, stumbled a little, righted herself, and climbed the five steps to the lock-up door.

She was glad now, and, clasping the loaves with one arm, she felt for the bars.

It was dark inside and Pearl called, "Father, Father, you in there?"

No answer came and she cried again.

This time it was, "Father, Father, I'm here!"

Still there was silence. She tried to see in, but her

forehead only reached to the top of the grating and she could not. The wind whistled and cried about the bars and the snow lashed the old clapboards. Once she thought she heard her father moan and the beat of his feet on the floor: clip-clop, clip-clop. Then out of the darkness of the place into which she could not see, came the words, "The Sun — plenty of joy, plenty of joy for all!"

With one hand Pearl pounded on the door. "Father, Father," she cried, her voice whipped off by the storm, "I'm here, I've brought you something to eat!"

There was no answer, only the audible mumble, turning over and over heavily, like a cartwheel of words, "Plenty of joy — plenty of joy for all — plenty of joy — plenty of joy for all!"

One of the loaves of bread was continually slipping from Pearl's clasp, and she had to fumble around for it in the drifting snow. Once more she pounded on the door, then she took a loaf, set the other two down, divided the loaf up and pushed it through the bars in pieces, except the crust which would not go through.

Pearl began to feel numb. She reached up, clutched the bars with her stiffening fingers, drew herself up and clung there, like some storm-frightened bird, toes thrust between bars and hands clinging to the grating. She was terrified, and her words beat wing-like and frantic upon the lock-up.

She clung as long as she could, clung till the little fingers had shaped themselves about the bars. Then from the old ragged shoes that could not bear the strain, her feet slipped, jerked her frozen fingers loose, and she fell backwards, rolled off the edge of the steps and lay, whimpering a little, in the snow. One tiny boot had remained fast between the bars, but the other had tumbled in on the Sun Chaser.

But for the tigerish leaps of the storm, all within and without grew swiftly silent. Within, dreams came of realized fleet steps, like warm wind rushing over hill and



mountain: clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, faster and faster. Dreams came without, too, of a little hand laid in a warm big hand, of a swift step, clip-clop, clippity-clop, clip-clop, clippity-clop, bearing her along the bright edges of sun-chased shadows, over ice-bound roads grown warm and smiling, of food a-plenty and lamps which shone gloriously, of a warm bosom which was not the snow's, and a mother's arms.

## X

Sybil Clark came out into the storm, her basket refilled. In the whirling snow through which she plunged, now ankle deep, now knee deep, life seemed, like the rage of the tempest, a sort of madness. The storm roared, howled, shrieked its derision about her. The blackness had shut down on her in walls, with once in a while a ghostly white birch flung into relief by a dash of light cast from the hurtling flood of cloud overhead. The storm laughed — she heard Ambrose laughing. Bough struck on bough — she heard the wild clip-clop, clip-clop of his step. He was the storm and the storm was Ambrose and the storm was life.

It was all clear to her and all worthless now except to get to Pearl and care for her, feed her, warm her, protect her.

Suddenly she heard a summoning cry not unlike the cry of her heart. Once again it came almost from under her feet. She looked down into the gleaming, jewelled eyes of a sheep huddled against the stone wall of the home pasture. She was bleating for her lamb. Sybil fought her way back from the pasture onto the road. Only half a dozen rods more and she would be home.

When she was within a few feet of the house its windows became distinct to her. Alternately they flared and grew dim. She entered and beat the snow from her feet and dropped the basket from her stiff hand. She saw that the candle had burned down to the socket of the candle-

stick, and was sputtering in a pool of thin grease. The fire, too, was almost out.

After the blast of the storm the chilled room felt warm to her. She worked for a few seconds over the stove, pulling off her cotton, sleet-cruste'd gloves. Then she rubbed her hands dazedly over her face. The warmth of the stove glowed on her. Interest in life, that had ebbed so far away, trembled an instant, and ebbed back to her again. The storm was outside. Inside she had Pearl, she had food for the child, there was a fire, there was shelter. This was one of the times when she did not choose to think of Ambrose. She had learned long ago that there were times when she had no choice but to forget him. She lifted her hat from her head, set a new candle in the stick and went towards the bedroom door.

"Pearl," she called lightly, "Mother's come!"

There was no answer.

"Pearl," she called again. "Mother's here! I've something for you to eat."

Over her came the emptiness of the room into which she spoke. She felt that there was nothing there. She took one quick step in, saw the vacant bed, turned and hurried into the kitchen. The child might have fallen asleep on a chair. She looked at the chairs, she looked at the floor, she called, she went upstairs, she went through the shed to the barn, she came hurrying and stumbling back.

Her call grew louder and louder, "Pearl! Pearl! Mother is here! Mother has come!"

She looked into closets, she pulled things hither and yon wildly and left them heaped and disordered in the rooms. The candle tilted and swayed in her trembling hand; the grease dripped on the floor.

Then came the moment when, with a cry, she stood stock still in the middle of the kitchen. *Pearl was gone!* With another cry, hatless, coatless, Sybil Clark turned, flung open the kitchen door, hurled herself into the

tempest and, two rods from the house door, was engulfed in the storm.

Out upon the hillside, against the stone wall of the pasture was huddled the sheep still bleating for her lamb. She knew that it was there somewhere in the white, battle-filled vastness. And to the ewe, out of that vastness, had come one cry, one and then another and another, all growing fainter. Above the storm the bleating of the ewe rose and fell, calling, pleading with the furious elements to give her back her little one—that little one the impatient stirring of whose feet she had felt in her womb in the early spring, whose moist, cool mouth had tugged at her udder the summer long.

Frantic, the sheep ran forward a little into the drifts that heaped up before her, and then, chest-deep, backed up to the stone wall again, bleating incessantly. Even crowded against the sheltering wall, the snow almost covered her forequarters. She lurched forward, then back again and stood there quivering, her eyes big with fear. After that she began alternately backing and filling between the stone wall and the whirling snow drifts in front.

Suddenly she stood still and listened. On the white, furious wing of the tempest there came to her some intelligence of her lamb, and she answered with a maddened cry and a plunge out into the drifts. For a few seconds, now here, now there, beyond the stone wall, the whirling snow seemed to boil. There were muffled cries and then there was silence.

## XI

The child's boot had fallen upon the Sun Chaser where he had dropped in a last effort at shaking a way out to further sun-chasing. The child's boot had dropped with a thud on the side of his face and tumbled off onto the floor and then stood quite still and upright beside the Sun Chaser's mouth. It was a most ragged little shoe. Long

ago had its toe been stubbed through, then the buttons had fallen off one by one until only two were left. These had jerked off when Pearl fell and now lay on the floor as bright as a pair of rat's eyes. There was not much of the boot left, but it still weighed something and was heavier because of the snow which had drifted through the bars and was settling down into its open top.

When the shoe struck the Sun Chaser it roused him from one stupefied state and precipitated him into one less stupefied. His hands twitched. His feet moved convulsively as he drew leather-shod up under him and sat leaning forward with his hand on wooden-shod. According to expectation and dreams, the work of years, what had fallen upon him being heavy, and striking strange wavering lights from his eyes, might be an analogue to the sun, corresponding to it in all things except warmth. In that mercurial, snow-reflected light, his hand fumbled beside him and his fingers spread out, net-like, for the catch. He felt and caught what was there and drew it towards him and held it up in the quicksilver of snow-light and discovered the shoe.

"Oho!" laughed Ambrose Clark, hope having returned, "little Sun Chasers at work!"

For a few seconds he sat still, playing like a child with the shoe and repeating, "Little Sun Chasers at work!"

Then he stared up at the bars, each bar straight and black in the silvern light. Nodules now were on those bars and Ambrose Clark, wooden-shod gathered on the knee of leather-shod, the little shoe in his hand, his eyes large and amazed, stared on.

"Something there and there and there," he laughed, pointing with the little boot. "Something sun-sent!"

He clutched the shoe and rose swayingly on leather-shod and swung wooden-shod to its mate in a circle like the leg of a compass. There was always wooden-shod to be dragged after him.

"Lots of little Sun Chasers!" he laughed triumphantly, as he drew himself up towards the bars.



Something there — rows of something all snow-flecked and white in the quicksilvern storm-light. With the shoe he touched the pieces of bread.

"You and you and you," he said. "Change! Sun-rays, wings, birds! Change quick! Change now! Fly in! Fly in!"

Then he touched a piece of the snow-covered bread and said, "Ouch!" in the voice of a child and laughed helplessly.

"Little shoe flew in to me!" he chanted. "Fly in, wings! See, little shoe! See wings! sun wings, storm wings, bird wings, all wings, all white and light. See!"

Gravely then did he match the shoe with each piece of snow-covered bread, laughing wildly like a child delighted with a new game. He dug the pieces of bread from between the bars with the toe of the shoe he held in his hand, repeating, "Fly in, wings!" as each one fell to the floor.

He came to the other shoe and paused, shaking his tawny hair. Two, where there should be only one! This had happened to him before.

"Go 'way, go 'way!" he begged. "Can't fool me. I'm Sun-Chaser!"

But the other shoe wedged in between the bars remained with the obstinacy of inanimate objects.

"Why don't you go 'way?" asked Ambrose.

The sturdy shoe remained where it was, the snow flakes on its copper toe melting under the hot breath of the Sun Chaser who was leaning nearer and nearer.

"Are you," he muttered, "are you, little shoe,— are you there?"

With the shoe in his hand he made a few passes around his head and laughed loudly, and shook his tawny hair in delight over the comicality of the scene. In those orbits common in sun-chasing — in dreams, too, for that matter — the shoe in his hand glided past the side of his head and struck the other shoe, knocking the snow from it and laying bare the copper toe which shone like an eye in the snow light.

"Oho!" laughed the Sun Chaser. "Give it to me, Pearl."

Then the little channel of recollection which had cleared a bit of the confusion of the Sun Chaser's thoughts away, even as the rill bears along the skeleton leaf, became clogged, and the Sun Chaser stopped and stared stupidly. He put out a hand and touched the copper tip. He exclaimed and looked down at the shoe in his hand, then out through the bars. He pressed up closer to the bars, his feet crunching on the bread, and on the snow which was drifting in, and long and curiously he looked out into the quicksilver light of the whirling, howling storm. Again he touched the copper tip and said, "Pearl!" He looked about the dark, unlighted room and out into the storm. He dropped the shoe that was in his hand and took hold of the bars and pressed his face against them just above where the copper toe was wedged in fast.

For an instant again his mind, like a rift in tempestuous clouds, was very clear.

"Pearl," he called, "Pearl, come in out of the storm!"

For the moment he knew where he was and what had happened. Some convergence of thoughts had bored through the wreckage of his mind, and he was himself and Pearl was — God only knew where!

"Pearl!" he shouted louder, grasping the bars and rattling them until the whole lock-up shook.

But he did not call again to her to come, for he knew that she could not. She was out there somewhere in that world of white rage and shrieking winds. The shoe in his hand he put between his teeth, and grasping the bars, shook them till the whole building cracked under the ice and snow. But the shoe wedged in between the bars remained where it was and the door continued fast. He shouted, he cried, he pleaded in tones that were whipped away on the gale. For answer came the wolfish howl of the tempest and the leap of the storm upon the lock-up. And with a yell he flung himself bodily against the door.

## XII

They started out, scuffling knee-deep through the snow, holding the lantern up, now here, now there, to be sure that they were in the road, faintly descriing a house lamp set in some window and glowing feebly like the most nebulous of stars, turning their faces aside to draw breath and then facing the storm and pushing on.

"What's that, Stephen?" asked the Doctor. "Don't you hear something over there?"

"No, sir."

"There it is again."

The cry reached them again, a long, hungry, wild cry.

"That awful sound?" asked the Sheriff.

The scream came again, mad, terrible and muffled as if it were being choked under heavy blankets.

Both men came to a standstill.

"My God, Stephen, what has happened?"

"Do you think it's one of those Canada lynxes lost in the storm?"

"Did you hear it then?" the Doctor asked.

"No, but —"

"There it is again!"

"It is n't a lynx, Doctor, but I don't know what it is. It's out there in the direction we're going. The walk's beyond here some place."

"Is n't it over there?"

"Yes, there."

The Doctor was fumbling with the toe of his heavy golosh for the little step up that would tell him where the path led in to the lock-up.

"I've found it," he said. "Come, make haste!"

Even as they turned at right angles to the direction in which they had been walking, the scream came again and following it, distinct even in the tumult of the tempest were loud blows and a sound as of running feet clip-clop, clippity-clop, clippity-clippity-clop.

"He's trying to get out."

"Hurry!" shouted the Doctor. "Something's gone wrong there."

Weird, maddened, frantic, the cry rose again and with it the beat of the stamping feet: clip-clop, clip-clop, clippity-clippity-clop.

"Listen," said the sheriff, "he's calling for something!"

Out through the rage of wind and snow, out through the night, out of the darkness, the cry shaped itself into words: "Pearl! Aah-yaiah! Pearl! Pearl! Aah-yaiah!"

"It's the little one," came from the Sheriff.

"Something's gone wrong," muttered the Doctor.

"Aah-yaiah! Pearl! Pearl!" came the wail again. "Aah-yaiah, little shoe, bring her in! Bring her in! Aah-yaiah!"

"Something about a shoe," replied the Doctor. "Here," he shouted towards the lock-up, "be quiet there! We're coming. Be quiet!"

"Pearl! Pearl! Pearl! Aah-yaiah!" rose wildly and was whirled off into the vastness of the storm.

"Can you see him anywhere?" asked the Doctor.

"Has he got out?" asked the Sheriff.

"No, see there! See his face, his eyes, he's up on the door clinging to the bars."

"He's gone mad," said the Sheriff.

"Something is wrong," came the reply.

"Aah-yaiah, little shoe, bring her in — bring Pearl in!" rose in a wail. "Bring her in — can't get out — bring her in. Aah-yaiah, Pearl, Pearl!"

The Doctor held the lantern high and close to the bars. Its light gleamed on tawny hair, the blood-shot eyes, the distorted face, the clinging hands of the Sun Chaser, and upon the heel of a little shoe stuck fast between the bars.

"There's her shoe," whispered the Doctor.

He held up the lantern looking into the cell.



"What's this?"

The Sheriff stumbled, leaned over and took out of the snow a loaf of bread still in its paraffin paper wrapping.

"Bread," said the Sheriff.

He held the lantern high and, his face close to the knotted, clinging fingers of the Sun Chaser, peered further into the lock-up.

"Aah-yaiah," wailed the Sun Chaser.

There was froth about his lips and snow shining in his hair. And he chattered with his teeth and shook his hair, and, clinging to the bars, rattled them.

"He must have seen her," muttered the Doctor, "she's here somewhere."

"Waiting for the Sun — the sun — the sun," repeated the Sun Chaser. "Sun up and Pearl found — little Pearl!"

"Here," said the Sheriff, and his voice was frightened, "here!"

The Sheriff was brushing the snow away from the child's white face.

The Doctor turned on the Sheriff. "My God, see what you've done!"

The Sheriff stood looking down rigidly at the swift work of the Doctor in uncovering the child, the light of the lantern revealing the face and the white throat.

The Doctor dropped on his knees, thrust his arms deep into the snow, under the child, and, gathering her up gently, rose to his feet again.

In the light of the lantern which the Sheriff held, the child's arms could be seen pointing stiff and unmoving upwards, the little fingers still crooked as they had been when they were wrenched from the bars. Her eyes were closed and the snowflakes on the little forehead made a twinkling halo about her hair.

"We'll take her in there. Unlock the door!" commanded the Doctor.

The Sheriff's key grated in the lock and, Pearl's little arms rigid and upstretched, they stepped into the cell.

When he beheld Pearl and the Doctor the Sun Chaser smiled happily. He touched the lantern and laughed childlikely, gratefully.

"Sun found Pearl — little Pearl came in — little shoe brought Pearl in!"

"Shall I stand against the door?" asked the Sheriff.

"No," growled the Doctor, "somebody's always been standing against any door that might have let him out."

The Sun Chaser touched his lips with the shoe he held in his hand, then he touched the child's cheek. "Little shoe, wake Pearl! Little shoe, wake Pearl! More sun! More sun!"

Suddenly he leaped into the air and started running around the cell, laughing, shaking his hair and clattering with wooden-shod and leather-shod: clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, and humming over and over, "Going after it — going after it — going after more sun for little Pearl!"

"Light up whatever you have here," said the Doctor.

"There is no lamp here," came from the Sheriff.

The Doctor was chafing Pearl's hands with snow. "I suppose you think when a man gets into a place like this he needs less light rather than more. Eh?"

"Keep that door open," commanded the Doctor.

The Sheriff set his lantern down and turned to push the door open.

The Sun Chaser seized it, crying out, "Here's sun, Doctor, here's sun for little Pearl."

"Set it down, Ambrose," commanded the Doctor quietly, "I need it just there for the child."

Ambrose set it down and then came and sat on the floor beside the Doctor.

"Pearl asleep?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the Doctor.

"Oh!" said the Sun Chaser. "Sun coming to my Pearl!"

"Now," said the Doctor, "start up the stove here!"

"There is n't any," admitted Stephen Short. And he dropped his head against the upright of the open door and

began to sob. "Don't blame me, for God's sake," he begged.

"I don't," growled the Doctor, tenderly stripping the white shoulders of the child. "It's what you represent I blame."

The Sun Chaser paused in the midst of tossing the child's shoe up into the air and looked at the Sheriff.

"Don't cry, boy," he said, "sun's coming!"

Then he continued his play. Wooden-shod on the knee of leather-shod, he kissed the little shoe and tossed it into the air.

From the doorway continued the heavy sobbing of the Sheriff, mingled with the long drawn-out howl of the wind.

Reassuringly the Sun Chaser looked up at the Sheriff and smiled. "Sun's warm, never mind," he said.

Again he leapt into the air, and started running about the cell, laughing, shaking his hair, and clattering with wooden-shod and leather-shod: clip-clop, clippity-clop, clip-clop, clippity-clop, and humming to himself, "Going after sun for Pearl, after sun for Pearl. Sun's warm!"

"See the child's hands," muttered the Doctor, "just as they froze clinging about the bars."

Whether the fine white lines of birch saplings etch the sombreness of bare woods or the golden leaves spread a glow through misty days, or spring flows again through every artery of the great world; whether the edges of the mist over the meadows about Northerly are smoke yellow with saffron from the autumn maple trees or silvery as the depths of a little pool where one might wash and become pure; whether the chaliced sunlight brim in the thick, translucent stems of plants or snow twinkle and melt on the globes of village lamps; whether gray stones be luminous at dawn or pale in the full light; whether Night lean down from the cliffs and draw dusk with him to passion and the stars; whether the shepherd's purse be full or empty, wings flash or lightning

glow, seed pods swell or rattle in the wind,—many a pilgrim passed through Northerly, there to lean hands on staff before a ruinous little building set somewhere between school house and paper-hanger's, and there to gaze and gaze at a child's shoe which no hands had ever withdrawn from between the bars whence a child's foot had slipped from shoe to snow.

Many years have gone by, but neither in wind nor in rain, sunlight or darkness, at dawn or dusk, has any one ever been pushed over that threshold into the cell again. Those who believed that Christ was no longer in the world, those who believed that Christ was; those with broken lives and those whose lives were whole; they, who, spending themselves in good works, were yet hungry, and those who did less and yet were satisfied through faith; they who had found themselves and they who in dreams by night and work by day sought for themselves; they who were young and would learn; they who still chased the sun and they who had found it; and they who were old and had a brave farewell to make; yea, the running feet of children between schoolhouse and paperhanger's—all, all, passed that way, paused, gazed upon the little shoe, beaten upon by every wind of heaven, warmed by every ray of sun, thought of the price paid, some of the lesson learned, heard the ceaseless tapping of the branches on the roof of the old place like an echo of long forgotten steps; clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, clip-clop, felt a little unseen hand placed in their hand, and passed on,—comforted by a child's love.